

Set Your Own Pace to Get Off the E-Mail Treadmill

Anita Bruzzese, Intuit 9/20/12



Do you check emails in the middle of the night or while at dinner with family or friends? Have you checked your messages while on vacation?

If so, you're not alone.

A new Working Simply survey finds that 84.5 million American employees say they're constantly checking work emails outside of the office. The practice, they say, is preventing them from fully engaging in their private lives, marring time with family, friends and their community.

"If we're buried in our smartphone or Blackberry, how engaged are we really in our personal or professional life?" says Carson Tate, managing partner for Working Simply. "Such a fractured [attention](#) doesn't lead to quality work or cutting-edge thinking."

[Working Simply](#) often advises companies like Coca-Cola and their employees how to better structure work and private time so that the balance leads to more engaged work, greater innovative thinking and higher productivity.

"The conversation really begins with ourselves," Tate says. "What are our personal [boundaries](#)? We need to define them because given the latitude, others will define those boundaries for us."

Purpose. "Reclaim your purpose," she advises. "What are you trying to accomplish?" She says you may have to ask yourself this question a couple of times a day to stay focused, and then consider it more holistically

throughout the year. Tate says Working Simply advises that individuals learn to set their own “pace,” which they also use as an acronym for their advice:

Accessibility.

“Rethink your calendar accessibility,” she advises. “Look at everything, from your work schedule to volunteering. What isn’t meeting your needs?” Tate says one woman she worked with had her direct reports literally following her into the restroom because she had no room on her calendar to speak with them. They found that was the only way to talk to her, which is a clear indication that something on the calendar needed to be adjusted, Tate says.

Cull.

It doesn’t take long for your to-do list to grow to unmanageable levels. Tate says if this is happening, it’s time to throw it out and start over. She suggests making a “stop doing” list that identifies activities that perhaps you’ve always done, but are no longer necessary to help you achieve your goals. A “start doing” and a “continue” list helps you focus on activities that will have the greatest payoff, she says.

Embrace.

A one-size-fits-all productivity method doesn’t exist and you must “embrace the way you think,” Tate says. “If you’re a visual person, maybe brightly colored Post-It notes work for you, while they may not work for someone else,” she says. “When you have to *force* yourself to use a productivity tool, it isn’t going to work.”

Finally, Tate advises the greatest tool may be the “off” button. For example, determine that your phone and email will be turned off at 8 p.m.. Turn off the pinging email alerts at work so “that you’re not constantly interrupted and derailed from what you’re doing,” she says.

In other words, the secret to finding engagement and happiness in your work and professional life may begin by you setting your own pace.

What email rules have you established to help you be more productive and balanced?

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